THE KEEPING OF THE SECRET

LITERARY SYNTHESIS IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S A MODERN MEPHISTOPHELES

by

SCOTT TREVOR MARESH

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William Rossi

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Dr. William Rossi

Louisa May Alcott had a literary relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne as well as a neighborly one. This relationship is reflected in Alcott's A Modern Mephistopheles, which draws not only on the tradition of Hawthorne as writer of romances (particularly The Scarlet Letter) but also on Alcott's experiences as a writer of sensationalist and ethical literature. By examining Alcott's novel in this case with Hawthorne's in mind, her much over-looked work recieves attention which it deserves, and her ability as a talented and highly astute writer of complex literature is illustrated.

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I

ALCOTT AS AUTHOR

> We have not much doubt that Julian Hawthorne is the author of A Modern Mephistopheles; and the belief should be understood as implying a compliment to his powers, for the book is certainly a remarkable one and instinct with ability.[1]

Although her anonymously published work was here attributed to her childhood friend, the son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcott's A Modern Mephistopheles is most definitely a novel of her own making. Julian Hawthorne did not write A Modern Mephistopheles, but Alcott does set up a relationship between her book and the elder Hawthorne's classic romance, The Scarlet Letter[2], by having her main characters discuss The Scarlet Letter at a critical point in the story. By including the form of the romance, particular motifs, and the development of the central characters in order to create a value structure around the dichotomy between intellect and emotion, Alcott invites readers to contemplate relationships and parallels between her book and Hawthorne's.

The attention Alcott gives to The Scarlet Letter does not come as any great surprise. In her journal entry for August, 1850, she comments that in her discussions with her

mother regarding Hawthorne's book and Fredrika Bremer's Easter Offering, she preferred the former:

> Reading Mrs. Bremer and Hawthorne. The "Scarlet Letter" is my favorite. Mother likes Mrs. B. better, as more wholesome. I fancy "lurid" things, if true and strong also.[3]

When, at the beginning of her career as a dedicated author, she reread The Scarlet Letter in 1864, she found that she "liked [it] better than ever."[4] The attraction to Hawthorne's novel is not startling. As Saxton explains in her biography of Alcott, Hawthorne's "fascination with amoral energy under the coating of morality" appealed to her, as did the fact that he wrote about "the commission of sin and its attendant guilt with an almost sensual pleasure."[5] Alcott, a woman who all her life suffered the psychological and emotional distress of a difficult and often damaging family life and who inherited the passions of her mother's side of the family, identified with the tormented characters written by Hawthorne; she was, under the directions of her father, "to organize her confusion of emotions," but she "could never pretend she didn't have them."[6] This "confusion" sparked empathy in Alcott for the turmoil surrounding moral issues in the lives of the passionate characters created by the likes of Hawthorne and Goethe, and it consequently provided an impetus for exploring the emotionally racked soul in her own writing.

In spite of any relationship to Hawthorne, however, A Modern Mephistopheles is definitely not a rehashing of

somebody else's literature. Louisa May Alcott's debt to other authors did not take the shape of a lifting of plots or a pirating of ideas. Instead, Alcott was an author who was acutely aware of the differing types of literature popular in her day and who readily experimented with the styles and genres available to her. She wrote "at least 270 works in every genre from poetry to tragedy."[7] Even though Alcott's fame most widely stems from her March family stories--Little Women, Jo's Boys, Little Men, Good Wives[8]--her works include adult novels, sensation stories, historical and feminist essays, poems, and even a painfully comic memoir of her family's attempt at communal living.[9]

Alcott's writings other than her juvenile works, particularly her more sensational works, lie in "the secret garden newly opened by feminist scholars."[10] Although she wrote many types of literature, the critical attention received by Alcott for Little Women has dominated the attention she received until recently. She was "for much of her life...regarded as 'The Child's Best Friend' and such stature as she attained was that of America's best-loved author of juveniles."[11] Alcott had written and published other genres before her immense success with Little Women in the fall of 1869, but it was only after the sale of 23,000 copies of her moralistic novel by the following August that she found herself a famous woman.[12]

Alcott's ethical works[13] neatly follow in the trends of literature of the middle of the century: of the more than one thousand works of fiction published in the United States between 1830 and 1850, "most of this fiction was by women...and most was concerned with domestic themes--courtship, marriage, religion, home management, child rearing, and education."[14] In the works which she wrote about home life, the stories of the March family, "Alcott constantly inculcates moral and religious values,"[15] as is characteristic of the ethical novel. These values, especially those regarding "sexual politics," reflect, the stance of women writers who, as explained by Nina Baym, in this realm, "saw themselves as disadvantaged compared to men...[and] rather than integrating physical sexuality into their adult personalities they tried to transcend it"[16]. Moreover, there existed a tendency for these novels to be "largely descriptive of events taking place in a home setting and...[to espouse] a 'cult of domesticity,' that is, fulfillment for women in marriage and motherhood."[17]

Even though Louisa May Alcott found her most widespread success as the writer of ethical literature, according to Madeleine Stern, her fundamental interests in writing fell into a different realm. In the course of an interview quoted by Stern: Alcott revealed "her fascination with sensational themes, declaring 'I think my natural ambition is for the lurid style. I indulge in gorgeous fancies and

wish that I dared inscribe them before the public.'"[18] Certainly, the influence of the "lurid" which she so readily recognized in Hawthorne's writings had left its mark on the ambitions of Alcott. She did in fact allow herself the outlet of writing "blood-and-thunder" tales and anonymously publishing the likes of "Pauline's Passion and Punishment" and "V.V.: or, Plots and Counterplots" as well as assuming the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard for "A Marble Woman."[19]

Alcott's experiences upon her return home from working as a Civil War nurse indicate the depth of her ability to envision the shocking. After six weeks of duty, she contracted typhoid fever and was "brought home in delirium" by her father, Bronson.[20] The extent of her dreams is startling:

> The most vivid & enduring [vision] was a conviction that I had married a stout, handsome Spaniard, dressed in black velvet with soft hands & a voice that was continually saying 'Lie still my dear.' This was mother, I suspect, but with all the comfort I often found in her presence there was blended an awful fear of the Spanish spouse who was always t(h)reatening me dreadfully all night long...A mob at Baltimore breaking down the door to get me, being hung for a witch, burned, stoned & otherwise maltreated were some of my fancies. Also being tempted to join Dr. W. & two of the nurses in worshipping the Devil. Also tending millions of sick men who never died or got well.[21]

Saxton points out in her modern biography of Louisa May Alcott that not only were these fantasies "material for stories," but they were also "expressions of Louisa's deepest sexual and emotional horrors."[22] Eventually, the

writing of gothic tales would allow Alcott a release for the turmoil of emotions inside of her.

The genre with which Alcott here works, what Nina Baym calls "'high-wrought fiction'...the domestic novel's antithesis,"[23] was a "feverish, florid, improbable, melodramatic, exciting genre."[24] According to another critic, the gothic works are rife with themes of women as "pawns in a game of lust, greed, and ambition"[25] as well as carrying strains of "sexual warfare,"[26] the battles between men who try to dominate women and the women who fight the attempts at subjugation. Alcott's interest in women's rights groups[27] may not have been sufficient impetus for writing blood-and-thunder stories, but her feminist views indicate that her political outlook would be consistent with her need for a creative outlet in which she could use themes of male domination of women and turn them, as she does in "Behind A Mask," against the patriarchy. Thus, by writing about the lurid, she was provided an avenue not only for releasing emotional tensions but also for simultaneously showing dissatisfaction with the male status quo.

In A Modern Mephistopheles Alcott combines what was for her the most successful form, the ethical, with her favorite genre, the sensational story.[28] As Stern puts it, speaking in terms of Alcott's literary personae in A Modern Mephistopheles, Alcott "would eventually grasp the

opportunity of combining the ethical principles of L.M. Alcott, writer of tales of sweetness and light, upon 'A.M. Barnard's' fascination with the horrors of the mind."[29] A Modern Mephistopheles is the reworking by Alcott of her 1866 thriller. Having rejected the original work as too sensational, Roberts Brothers of Boston, anonymously published the revised version in the No Name Series in 1876.[30] With no worries about protecting her reputation as a leading juvenile writer[31], as MacDonald points out, Alcott was able to retain many of "the devices evident in the thrillers, the original inspiration for the story in 1866"[32] while incorporating elements of her bread-and-butter, "the sentimentality [which] was in perfectly good popular literary taste."[33] Alcott "used the conventions of both gothic and sentimental fiction to explore the darker side of human nature,"[34] drawing on her own personal background to access both sides of her up-bringing as described by Showalter: "the paternal side [from which] comes the voice of rational, realistic, and didactic, defining but also forbidding access to patriarchal authority" and from "the maternal side [from which] comes a more imaginative voice, seductive but culturally marginal."[35]

THE PRESENCE OF HAWTHORNE

Louisa May Alcott drew heavily on her family experiences for her writing, but, having grown up in a highly intellectual community, she also felt the influence of the thinkers around her: Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, to name but a few. The extent to which Alcott respected and was shaped by her father's circle of Transcendentalist[36] friends is well documented. Her ties to her sometime neighbor, the reclusive Nathaniel Hawthorne, a writer who separated himself from most of the goings-on of the dedicated Transcendentalists, are less clear. However, Alcott does leave a literary clue as to her personal feelings about the Hawthornes: she wrote a poem, "The Hawthorne,"[37] to "thank Hawthorne and his family for their neighborly benevolence."[38] Although the exact date on which Alcott wrote her poem is unknown, it can be placed in a time period in which Nathaniel Hawthorne's "health was failing and he was desperately striving to complete his last romances."[39] According to Rita Gollin, the poem "is testimony to her critical acuity as well as to her sympathetic admiration of her neighbor that her poem links him to the two Concord writers both she and present-day readers most admire, Emerson and Thoreau."[40] By focusing the poem around the central metaphor of the hawthorne tree, she makes this connection in the final stanza of the poem:

> Long may it stand the friendly tree
> That blooms in Autumn as in Spring,

> Beneath whose shade the humblest hind
> May safely sit, may gratefully sing.
> Time will give it an ever green name,
> Ice cannot harm it, frosts cannot kill,
> With Emerson's pine & Thoreau's oak
> Will the Hawthorne be loved & honored
> still.[41]

Alcott's link to Hawthorne as neighbor in the community of Concord is an easy one to make, and her respect for the writer is also evident, as shown by clues found in poems and journals. Alcott would also have been aware of Hawthorne as a part of the literary community of the nineteenth century. Hawthorne's position in American writing circles was such that, according to Richard H. Brodhead in The School of Hawthorne, "the turn toward Hawthorne as inspiration and guide...became, for writers emerging not long after Melville, [that is, beginning in the 1850's,] a standard, even a compulsory literary relation."[42] Moreover, Hyatt H. Waggoner claims of the author of The Scarlet Letter that:

> not only has his work given pleasure and inspired gratitude in succeeding generations of readers, it has made itself felt in the work of later writers even without offering them either a literary form or a message to imitate or adapt to new needs.[43]

While acknowledging that the grounds for determining the amount which one writer affects another's fiction is ultimately subjective,[44] Waggoner points out that Hawthorne has been a prominent figure to other writers. And "to be useful in a more than superficial sense," explains Waggoner, "an older writer must strike a responsive chord in the younger, inspire a sense of kinship,"[45] Although one

can never know exactly the extent to which Hawthorne struck a chord in Louisa May Alcott, I hope to show in this study that some literary "kinship" existed.

According to Brodhead, Hawthorne was a formidable influence on American writers in the years following his death, an influence that can be attributed to many aspects of his writing and which has made him "the only major American author never to have been underestimated."[46] However, his initial success, the success with which Alcott would have been familiar, resulted to a significant degree from his connections with publishers who were willing to and did market Hawthorne's writings in a forceful manner. He affiliated himself with the publishing institutions which "could establish the greatest degree of prestige for his work."[47] Hawthorne himself admitted the necessity of his marketing machine in 1862, writing to his publisher, James T. Fields that "my literary success, whatever it has been or may be, is the result of my connection with you."[48] Brodhead asserts that "this is no exaggeration,"[49] and the result is that "what Hawthorne represents to his nineteenth-century successors, the history of his institutionalization also equips us to see....these authors experience Hawthorne as the canon represents him: as if he were somehow interchangeable with literature itself."[50] This is the Hawthorne of whom Louisa May Alcott, a very astute reader and writer, would have been aware.

The Hawthorne with whom Alcott was familiar was also the Hawthorne who was the self-proclaimed writer of romances. Hawthorne labeled his major works "romances" and used the prefaces to these works as a medium for developing his ideas on the form.[51] However, the definition of "romance" as genre was not cut and dried in its meaning. Seemingly, every person had his or her own idea of what exactly constitutes a romance. Clara Reeve's 1785 essay The Progress of Romance defines the romance as "an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things."[52] An 1842 review of Dickens in the Christian Examiner explains the romance as mingling all other forms of fictive writing, fusing "the stately epic tread of heroes on an elevated stage, with the passion and sentiment of the tragic muse...borrow[ing] the tenderness of the pastoral...while with the novel its lot turns on the principle of retributive justice."[53] The September 1850 American Review calls the romance a "panorama of life...[which] surveys men and manners in mass, avoids all analytic investigations of character, and deals for the most part in broad and free strokes...vivid, startling, and fond of effect."[54] But at least one common thread in the nineteenth-century definitions of romance is the "fabulousness" of the literature. Beyond this, any adaptation of the romance is, as Stubbs indicates, a hybrid of several definitions.

Why has Hawthorne been so often regarded as the master of the American romance?[55] According to Stubbs, he developed his work out of the "terms of nineteenth century writers and critics and...assimilated the parts of their definition, sometimes straightforwardly, sometimes ironically."[56] Hawthorne took the many ideas of his time, developed them into a working formula, and consistently applied that method to his own writings. He developed different "balances: verisimilitude and ideality; the natural and the marvelous; and history and fiction,"[57] as well as "the conflict between passionate, self-assertive, and self-expressive inner drives and the repressing counterforces that exist in society and are also internalized within the self."[58] The importance of this interplay of dichotomies is that they furthered "the primary aim of the romancer...to gain an artistic distance from human experience. The romance differs from the novel in the extent of this distance."[59]

In his Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne describes how this distance from human experience provides creative freedom for the romancer:

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel...[the romance] so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.[60]

However, as Nina Baym points out, Hawthorne had already "defined the focus of all four of his completed long romances"[61] in The Scarlet Letter. In his accompanying essay, "The Custom House" he had already addressed the issue of artistic distance. Here Hawthorne's persona reflects on how the moonlight in his room visually creates the same distance for which the romancer strives:

> Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly,--making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility,--is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment, the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall;--all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect.[62]

In this discourse, in which "the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet and each imbue itself with the nature of the other,"[63] Hawthorne sets the precedent for his use of the label "romance" for his four novels. Hawthorne's romance, then, can be seen as developing the concepts of "carefully textured artifice," "fabulousness," and the balance of seemingly mutually exclusive extremes. He develops these different qualities of the romance into an extreme artistic distance from human experience. Hawthorne's conception of

romance allows him extensive freedom to create the artifice, ultimately better to tell truths about the human heart. Consequently, Hawthorne's romance becomes a means of exploring the depths of human souls and the struggles and conflicts between them, while retaining a footing in reality.

It is this same overlapping of the "Actual" and the "Imaginary" which I see Alcott developing in order to express moral truth in A Modern Mephistopheles. She draws on her experience as a sensationalist writer, utilizing the heightened reality of her gothic works (the reality which is sensationalized because it is written to reflect the real world, but is more extreme than the real world), while ultimately returning to the morality of her didactic works. Like Hawthorne, she synthesizes literary forms and expectations in a way that gives her an artistic freedom in order to create a means for exploring the psychology of relationships.

Alcott's hybridization does in fact reflect Hawthorne's work. As I indicated at the start of this study, some critical speculation at the release of A Modern Mephistopheles attributed the novel to Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's son. A Modern Mephistopheles all but asks to be compared to the elder Hawthorne's work, specifically The Scarlet Letter, as Louisa May Alcott features an extensive dialogue regarding his book between

the two most important characters in her Mephistophelean romance. I have already shown that Alcott had a knowledge of Hawthorne as neighbor and as author. Moreover, she had the literary background to draw on Hawthorne while being able to employ other genres in which she had already established herself. Consequently, I see Alcott as desiring a comparison of her work and Hawthorne's. Interestingly, Alcott neither tries to hide her respect for and knowledge of Hawthorne, nor does she attempt to belittle his work and subsequently place her literary standing above his. Instead, she meets up to the challenge implicit in what Brodhead calls the "compulsory literary relation" with Hawthorne as "inspiration and guide": she considers what has been done before and then she steps forward to expand on the work of her predecessor, writing in her own style instead of merely aping Hawthorne's. Alcott wrote a novel which invites a comparison to The Scarlet Letter, not only to seek similarities, but also for an audience to consider how Alcott developed on her experience with Hawthorne.

II

ALCOTT'S NOVEL

> Had he been a better man, he would not have sinned; had he been a worse one, he could not have suffered; being what he was, he did both, and, having no one else to study now, looked deeply into himself and was dismayed at what he saw.
> -- *Louisa May Alcott, A Modern Mephistopheles regarding Jasper Helwyze.*[64]

A Modern Mephistopheles loosely parallels the Faustian legend found in both Goethe's and Marlowe's writings. Alcott does not adhere strictly to the plots of these authors' works; instead, she incorporates the myth through use of fundamental themes and characters. A Modern Mephistopheles opens in the chamber of Felix Canaris, a young, aspiring poet whose rejection by publishers and lack of family, friends, and money moves him to attempt suicide. He tries to asphyxiate himself with the smoke of his burning writings when Jasper Helwyze interrupts him at the last minute, offering him a reason to live. A month later, a recovered Canaris agrees to give Helwyze control over his life in exchange for a chance to be published. This deal, which is actually fulfilled by publishing Helwyze's works under Canaris's name, parallels the deal struck between Faust and Mephistopheles; Canaris sells his liberty for fame

and fortune just as Faust traded his soul in an attempt to achieve happiness.

Canaris and Helwyze play the parts of Faust and Mephistopheles; Alcott also includes her own Margaret and Martha in Gladys and Olivia, each paired with the appropriate romantic counterpart according to the Goethean myth. In fact, upon the first encounter between Olivia and Helwyze, Olivia calls Gladys and Felix in the garden "Faust and Margaret, playing the old, old game," to which an unseen Helwyze replies, referring to himself and Olivia, "and Mephistopheles and Martha looking on"(36). Gladys, Olivia's charge, loves Canaris. He tells Gladys the story of Olivia killing Helwyze's emotion by jilting him. In this way, Felix tries to make Gladys love Helwyze because Olivia (who has since tried continually to rekindle the old love through devotion to Helwyze) is the object of his (Felix's) emotions. Helwyze complicates the "psychological quadrilateral"[65] by insisting that Canaris wed Gladys in spite of Canaris's disinterest in her. Canaris is bound to Helwyze, having received the promised success, and, after a failed attempt to woo Olivia, Canaris marries Gladys. Initially, Gladys knows nothing of the bargain between the two men, but she awakens love in Canaris during an erotic dramatic performance which she and Olivia stage for their men. Consequently, Felix tells her all and the two decide

they will try to earn enough money in secret to be able to renounce their dependence on Helwyze.

During his exposure to Gladys, Helwyze's capacity to love is resurrected and he realizes that he gave to Canaris the very thing which he most covets. He is crushed to find out from an interview with Gladys (in which he has drugged her with hasheesh) not only that she does not love him, but that she is afraid of his love. Gladys promises to save him from his tendency to evil, though, if he will follow her good example. Tensions mount as the love between Gladys and Canaris grows stronger and Helwyze is left lonely; Helwyze simultaneously feels his grip on Canaris slip away as Canaris discovers that love and family are more valuable than his fame founded on deceit. Both men lose their chance at earthly happiness when Gladys dies in delivering Canaris's son; her last gesture remains constant with her angelic character, and she begs the two men, rivals in love and enemies in their contract, to make peace.

Helwyze suffers a debilitating physical attack after Gladys's death. Broken, he offers not to take Canaris's fame from him as it might financially help the young man in the future; Felix realizes that he must work hard to earn the path to happiness which lies in the future in Heaven with Gladys and he rejects Helwyze's offer. Canaris leaves to begin his new life alone, and the book closes with Helwyze distraught at his inability to reach the peace which

only Gladys could offer; Helwyze cannot follow Gladys as can Canaris because Helwyze lacks Felix's faith. Helwyze finds himself dependent on Olivia, reaching to her as his eternal friend and companion despite his feelings for Gladys.

Alcott's novel, as I have asserted, invites comparison with Hawthorne's. In making this comparison, I will consider various aspects of both books--aspects such as themes, character, form, and other techniques and stylistic points--in order to show her use of Hawthorne both as a model to be emulated and as a model to change. I will also indicate in the course of my analysis points at which Alcott's novel reflects her ability to synthesize genres which had been successful for her before the completion of A Modern Mephistopheles. I have posited that Hawthorne and Alcott both explore the psychology of relationships in their novels, and I have subsequently divided my analysis of the books into power as held by males, power as held by females, and an additional brief commentary on sexuality as addressed by the authors in their respective works.

MEN OF POWER

Alcott paints a sinister physical picture of Helwyze--"thin-lipped," "intensely black" eyes, with "an indefinable expression of power pervad[ing] the whole face" where "in the eyes ...all the vitality of the man's indomitable spirit

seemed concentrated, intense and brilliant as a flame which nothing could quench"(13). Similarly, "sometimes a light glimmered out of [Chillingworth's] eyes, burning blue and ominous, like the reflection of a furnace...like one of those gleams of ghastly fire that darted from Bunyan's awful doorway in the hill-side, and quivered on the pilgrim's face".[66] No matter how villainous Helwyze's physical appearance, however, his evil is most exemplified in his interactions with the other characters; Jasper's "frequent gesture...and most significant to any one who knew that his favorite pastime was touching human heart-strings with marvelous success in producing discord by his uncanny skill" is revealing of his nature.(40) As Stein indicates, no action would exist without the Mephistophelean character; like Chillingworth, Helwyze must manipulate the lives of others, and although Chillingworth's motives appear clearer than Helwyze's for doing this, a parallel can be established between the impetus behind the actions of each. Because he is extreme and more than real, Alcott's sinister character, in the same vein as those in her sensationalist works, has the effect of achieving the artistic distance for which Hawthorne aimed.

Helwyze's lack of faith stems from the same source as does his power--knowledge. Like Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter, the aptly named Helwyze is painted demoniacally. Using W.B. Stein's analysis of

Mephistophelean characters in Hawthorne's fiction, an analysis which is appropriate for ALcott's character as well, we recognize Helwyze as an intellectual with supernatural tendencies and as

> the motive behind the other characters. The action into which [the Mephistophelean character] goads [the other characters] always leads to their ruin, but without his stimulation it does not appear that there would be any action at all. Mephistopheles' role...is really that of a prompter and stage-manager. He is a plotter who sets the conflict in motion and leads his puppets on to an assault on moral law that precipitates their doom.[67]

Helwyze parallels Chillingworth from the first scene of his mysterious and timely entrance. As Helwyze opens the door and finds himself facing the smoke of Canaris's apartment, he cries, "The Devil!"(8), in a manner half exclamatory and half announcing his arrival. In similar terms, Canaris describes Helwyze's arrival:

> as if I unwittingly conjured from the fire kindled to destroy myself a genie who had power to change me from the miserable wretch I was into the happy man I am (27-28).

Just as Chillingworth's medicinal knowledge made him appear a godsend to early Boston and Arthur Dimmesdale, so Helwyze enters under the guise of a friend. However just as Roger is to be the symbol of evil in The Scarlet Letter, Alcott foreshadows Helwyze's role as Mephisto. Jasper responds to Felix's query of "what good angel sent you?" with "your bad angel, you might say..."(10); and as Chillingworth implies his Mephistophelean nature in indicating to Hester that it

is Dimmesdale's soul which he will entice "into a bond that will prove the ruin of it," just "like the Black Man,"[68] Jasper ensnares Canaris's soul.

Significantly, in a conversation Gladys and Helwyze hold regarding The Scarlet Letter, Helwyze reveals that he feels compassion for Chillingworth, as he believes that his own capacity for love has been extinguished just as Hawthorne's character's emotions had been destroyed. Chillingworth prolongs Dimmesdale's life in The Scarlet Letter specifically to allow the preacher's guilt to fester, tormenting him horribly until his death, actions Helwyze claims justify Chillingworth's actions. As he states to Gladys, "Roger was the wronged one, and the others deserved to suffer"(242). Helwyze, too, had suffered his wrong, although it had happened long before when Olivia forsook his love. The reader is given a glimpse of Jasper's motivation when he tells Olivia to try "and see what an exciting game it becomes when men and women are the pawns you learn to move at will..."(46) to which Olivia, the heart which best understands him, replies that his endeavor is "an impious pastime, a dearly purchased fame, built on the broken hearts of women"(46). She implies that Helwyze's desire to vent his hostility at being denied love has become an aggression toward others, and, as a woman who has been injured by his repeated denial of her love since their falling out, she generalizes women to be the victims of his actions. To

Helwyze, who claims that his "passions are all dead"(43) and who had no control over his life with Olivia, women are the cause of his lack of feelings and, as a result, his lack of conscience in his interactions; consequently, he manipulates the lives of others. Felix presents the perfect opportunity for Helwyze to "get even" not only because Canaris's position makes him likely to accept his bargain, but also because "...despite [Felix's] hard case he possessed beauty, youth, and the high aspirations that die hard--three gifts often particularly attractive *to those who have lost them all*"(11, my emphasis). Moreover, Felix is described in feminine terms ("luxuriant locks," "white throat," "large, dreamy eyes," and "voluptuous lips"(14-15)), making him an even more likely target for a Helwyze who is antagonistic toward women. Like Chillingworth, Helwyze wants to punish the man who has what he does not (particularly a future and the prospect of love to come), and who represents what he has lost.

This parallel is not an unlikely one, as both Helwyze and Chillingworth have had their emotions decimated by unfaithful love only to have the void filled by intellect (with Alcott's blood-and-thunderous Helwyze becoming the antithesis of the heroine of virtue). Chillingworth, considered by Bostonians to be a "potent necromancer,"[69]

> was a striking evidence of man's faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil's office. This unhappy person had effected

> such a transformation by devoting himself, for seven years, to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he analyzed and gloated over.[70]

In "deriving his enjoyment" from the analysis of Dimmesdale's tortured heart, Roger becomes an entity devoid of feelings of love, forgiveness, and compassion; Hawthorne's language indicates that Chillingworth views his relations with the others in the manner of a scientist conducting an experiment to further the body of knowledge. In parallel fashion, Helwyze becomes an "intellectual devil"(86)--

> "I am wiser now, and live here, not here," he answered, touching first his forehead then his breast, with melancholy meaning. "While my brain is spared me I can survive the ossification of all the heart I ever had, since, at best, it is an unruly member. Almost as inconvenient as a conscience; that thank fortune, I never had. Yes, to study the mysterious mechanism of human nature is a most absorbing pastime."46)

Like Chillingworth, Helwyze behaves amorally in studying and directing the lives of those around him. Both are creatures of intellect associated with books and who act in a manner void of emotion; Helwyze's domain is the library/study, and Olivia describes his "level [as being] where intellect is God, conscience ignored, and love despised"(47).

However, Alcott's Helwyze does not entirely parallel Hawthorne's Chillingworth; Helwyze is, in fact, the much better developed of the two characters because he is much more human. Chillingworth remains static throughout <u>The</u>

Scarlet Letter, from his momentary, emotional contortion at his entrance to the end of the book when he dies:

> All his strength and energy--all his vital and intellectual force--seemed at once to desert him [once Dimmesdale, his reason to live, was gone]; insomuch that he positively withered up, shrivelled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight...this unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it,--when, in short there was no more devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay is wages duly.[71]

As this passage conveys, Chillingworth is drawn allegorically, as something more than real, more than human, so as a character he heightens Hawthorne's artistic distance from reality. He has no compassion or love to sustain him once his methodical exercise in revenge is completed. Like Chillingworth, Helwyze admits an earlier capacity to love, but unlike Chillingworth, Helwyze shows glimpses that, although he claims that emotion is dead in him, he still has the capacity for feeling for others. As early as the scene in which Jasper demands that Felix marry Gladys, his slightly comforting nature proves "that the man's heart was not yet quite dead"(175). Moreover, although Helwyze thanks heaven that all his "passions are dead, else life would be a hell, not the purgatory it is,"(42-43) several moments later he speaks longingly of how "fallen angels (referring to himself) sigh for the heaven they have lost and try to rise

again on the wings of spirits stronger and purer than themselves [i.e. Gladys]"(47). This shift from glad-to-have-no-emotions to hoping-to-rise-on-the-wings-of-angels demonstrates Jasper's inability to fully commit to a life of amoral heartlessness as well as demonstrating the role of women as positive influences on men, which can be seen in much nineteenth century ethical literature. Helwyze is trying to create his own power over emotions through his discourse, but this fails as his love for Gladys takes control of his life and, by the end of the book he confesses that "life before was Purgatory, now it is Hell..."(290) because he must now live with the pain which accompanies love.

Stein says the Mephistophelean character must assume the position of "prompter and stage-manager"; Helwyze does this. The resultant sense of distance from reality achieved by the theatrical is similar to the distance Hawthorne directly addresses in his discourses on the romance as form. Interestingly, however, as stage-manager Helwyze is unable to maintain the distance necessary to remain separate from the action of his drama. Just as Louisa May Alcott projects pieces of her past onto her characters and her stories, she seems to be indicating here that in fact the very distance between the artist and the subject which Hawthorne explores ultimately must break down. In any case, ultimately Helwyze cannot remain separate from the drama which he has created.

He watches the unfolding love of Canaris for Olivia "as if at a play"(80), and when he watches the scenes performed by Olivia and Gladys, he is excited because of "the double drama [that was] passing on that little stage"(192)--the drama of the theatrical scenes and the drama of the interaction of the characters putting on the scenes. But as Helwyze loses control over knowledge and knowledge begins to control him, he becomes less directive and more reactive to the events of which he has become a part. When telling Canaris that he should not write a novel but instead should try a tragic play, he quotes Goethe:

> In the novel it is sentiments and events that are exhibited; in the drama it is characters and deeds. The novel goes slowly forward, the drama must hasten. In the novel, some degree of scope may be allowed to chance; but it must be led and guided by the sentiments of the personages. Fate, on the other hand, which, by means of outward, unconnected circumstances, carries forward man, without their own concurrence, to an unforeseen catastrophe, can only have place in the drama. Chance may produce pathetic situations, but not tragic ones...Fate ought always to be terrible; and it is in the highest sense tragic when it brings into a ruinous concatenation the guilty man and the guiltless with him (236).

This statement denotes exactly the situation in which Helwyze has placed himself. By creating a drama and considering himself the directing agent of it, he has fashioned a situation in which the outcome can only be determined by Fate. Consequently, when Helwyze allows himself to become involved with the characters of the drama

on a personal level, he unwittingly relinquishes his control over them, and himself, to a higher power of emotion.

Alcott develops the theme of power through knowledge by initially having the intellectual men hold the power, but later shifting the power in the novel to the women as they learn more about themselves, each other, and the men. Helwyze controls events for the better part of the book, and Alcott establishes the library as his seat of power, the place from which his writings flow and the source of his control over Felix. Moreover, even in love, Helwyze makes intellect his ivory tower, for in his feelings for Gladys, "it was her intellect that [Helwyze] loved and wanted, not her heart...her mind with all its lovely possibilities, Helwyze coveted, and reasoned himself into the belief that he had "a right to enjoy it"(232). However, Jasper falters in watching Gladys, "perceiving also how much heart had quickened intellect, [he] began to long for both, and to grudge his pupil to her new master [Felix]"(232). While Helwyze's knowledge that Canaris is a fraud allows him initially to manipulate the young man, later, when Felix lets Gladys in on the secret, the young couple is able to compile the necessary control to break free from the bond which binds both of them to Jasper. That is, by sharing the knowledge with Gladys, Felix empowers her to assist him in his deliverance from Helwyze, and Gladys then becomes the

heroine of ethical fiction who saves her man through moral guidance.

But the power of Helwyze's intellect folds as he discovers he is in love with Gladys, and, at that point, knowledge becomes Helwyze's enemy. But by the time of this realization, he has already abused his ability to attain and control knowledge, drugging Gladys to query her about her emotions for him, so that "in that temporary oblivion perhaps he might discover what he burned to know"(181). In a scene in which Alcott reveals that Helwyze's desire for power over Gladys is sexual, where the lurid conveys the truth for which Hawthorne strove in the romance, Helwyze interrogates Gladys at her bedside in a particularly sensationalized scene (in which he drugs her with hasheesh) and, finding that Gladys was afraid of his love and would only feel safe upon his death,

> his punishment began...finding the truth a heavier burden than baffled doubt or desire had been; since forbidden knowledge was bitter to the taste, forbidden love possessed no sweetness, and the hidden hope, putting off its well-worn disguise, confronted him in all its ugliness (208).

It is at this juncture in the book that Helwyze no longer controls knowledge; instead, his knowledge of himself and his unrequited love for Gladys disables and thus controls him. In fact, once Gladys dies, he can find no consolation for his "sin of misusing of one of Heaven's best gifts," for "intellect had been his god, and he already felt it tottering to its fall".(280). Typical of the domestic

fiction of Alcott's day as well as of Alcott's own sensational tales, the heroine holds the power. Thus, Alcott is able to define power as both spiritual and sexual, reflecting both genres of literature.

WOMEN OF POWER

In allegorical terms, Gladys is this higher power of the morally pure heroine. She is the angel on whose wings Helwyze aspires to be lifted from his purgatory, and she is the one who, by assisting Canaris, ultimately defeats the mastery of Helwyze (224-226). As Helwyze is the representation of sinister intellect, Gladys signifies the good that is found in emotion, religion, love; she seems to be:

> the embodied spirit of all that was most high and pure...(22)

and her

> girlish bosom hid a spirit as strong as pure, capable of deep suffering, exquisite happiness, heroic effort.(65)

Moreover, in her drugged slumber

> it seemed if some angel had Gladys in especial charge, bringing light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, good out of evil; for no harm came to her,--only a great peace, which transfigured her face till it was as spiritually beautiful, as that of some young Madonna (210).

She receives "the help sent by Heaven, when most she needed it"(213) in the form of her pregnancy, and she even "inspires something like genuine compassion"(66) in Jasper.

Gladys overwhelms the reader as a representation of the good of the heart, and perhaps the best way to understand her is to consider her development from an innocent (essentially naive) girl to a strong woman, determined to save the man she loves. Her development both spiritually and sexually are conveyed (as is Olivia's spirituality and sexuality) by flower imagery. Initially, the narrator associates Gladys with the lilies of the garden, the white flowers being juxtaposed to the red roses of the balcony. In the following scene, the connection between women and flowers continues as Olivia, a more mature woman, is identified with the roses. Having given Jasper a red rose which he peels, leaf by leaf, Olivia moves to pluck another for him; he replies:

> No, let them hang; their rich color pleases best among the green; their cloying perfume is too heavy for the house. A snowdrop, leaning from its dainty sheath undaunted by March winds, is more to my taste now,' he said, dropping the relics of the rose, with the slow smile which often lent such significance to a careless word (45).

Clearly, the pure snowdrop is Jasper's symbol for Gladys just as the rose signifies Olivia, whose emotions Helwyze has laid bare like the golden heart at the center of it. Regretfully, Olivia owns that she is unable to give him the spring flowers which are "all gone long ago"(45)

Gladys is associated with the white flowers traditionally symbolic of virginal innocence up through her wedding, after which she enters Helwyze's study carrying

"all the sweet, pale flowers blooming in the garden that first Sunday of September"(100)--at this transitional point, being neither the unadulterated spirit of unmarried youth nor the experienced woman of a consummated marriage, she is linked to neither the white springtime flowers nor the symbol of passion, the red rose. Once she returns from her honeymoon, however, she has developed into a woman and is maturing, confidant, and ready to exert her control over those around her. Alcott expresses this transformation of Gladys through the imagery of the scene in which she enters her new apartments:

> The newly kindled light filled the room with a dusky splendor; for deepest crimson glowed everywhere, making her feel as if she stood in the heart of a great rose whose silken petals curtained her round with a color, warmth, and fragrance which would render sleep a "rapture of repose." Womanlike, she enjoyed every dainty device, every sumptuous detail; yet the smile of pleasure was followed by a faint sigh, as if the new magnificence oppressed her, or something much desired had been forgotten (102).

Gladys assumes the descriptions of a mature woman that had hitherto been reserved for Olivia--by stepping into the chamber, she leaves her earlier, unsuspecting nature behind her, the "something forgotten." This event marks a subtle yet significant transformation in Gladys, for when she is associated with the white, spring flowers, the events around her life (that is, the arrangement of the marriage to Felix) are directed by others. After her maturity, however, she becomes an active party in determining the course of her

life--in fact, she ultimately becomes the most powerful force in the book' "for, brought there as a plaything, 'Little Gladys,' without apparent effort, had subjugated haughty Olivia, wayward Felix, ruthless Helwyze, and no one rebelled against her"(220).

Hawthorne also utilizes the convention of floral imagery, a convention heavily used by the women writers of ethical literature, by linking the rose to the concept of the knowing woman. Like Gladys, Hester embodies passion, strength, and discipline in exemplary proportions, and the rose is linked to this aspect of Hester; Hester has the knowledge of the heart which Gladys exhibits. Initially, the reader of The Scarlet Letter sees the rose juxtaposed not against the white flowers of youth, but rather against the "black flower of civilized society,"[72] a prison. In this way, the rose is linked to Hester, who issues from the prison. The roses, placed next to the prison "to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner...as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him,"[73] works parallel to the hope which Gladys inspires in the "prisoners" of the pact between Jasper and Felix; she represents the natural from which the residents of the (over)intellectualized world of Helwyze's literary circle need respite. The rose bush as symbol for woman of (carnal) knowledge is further strengthened several lines later when Hawthorne connects it

with Ann Hutchinson, who was imprisoned in the jail described in The Scarlet Letter for Antinominianism; she (in seventeenth century Boston) "extolled salvation by faith, the intuitive revelation of God's indwelling grace"[74] much as Alcott has Gladys extol her faith.

As in A Modern Mephistopheles, the rose also signifies the knowing of a woman who is no longer a child; the scarlet letter worn on Hester's breast is reminiscent of a rose, in its crimson glory, which consequently becomes a symbol of carnal knowledge. It represents Hester's inner struggle between the passionate, self-expressive inner forces and the repressive counter forces which are developed by society. Moreover, the rose is also linked to Pearl, who seems to possess inherent knowledge of her mother's and Dimmesdale's sin, ignoring the Scarlet "A" for weeks at a time only to stare knowingly at it and dropping comments to Hester and the preacher about her origins and her tie to Dimmesdale. In fact, in the governor's garden, the minister John Wilson likens her to a red rose because of the color of her dress; soon thereafter, he asks who made her (meaning God), Pearl "finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door."[75] Essentially, Pearl possesses from birth the knowledge of subjects which one is supposed to learn only through maturity--this explains her affiliation to the rose at her early age, even without

having gone through an initiation rite to adulthood, such as the marriage which pushes Gladys from the realm of the white spring flower to that of the rose. This knowledge accounts for her intuitive understanding that she is related to Dimmesdale, her awareness that the common perception of Chillingworth as benign is a misconception, and her comprehension of the significance of the scarlet letter.

Just as the scarlet letter, represented by both the embroidered "A" on her breast and in the young Pearl, is Hester's punishment,[76] so too is it her strength: "Pearl keeps me here in life!"[77]. Likewise, Gladys achieves a new strength when she becomes the adult woman for which the rose is a metaphor. This strength is best exemplified by the way she controls the men in the story, those who would, in one manner or another, master her. Helwyze is not able to strip Gladys to her heart as he does Olivia--both in the reality of her emotions and in the physical metaphor of the peeled rose. Where the young woman Olivia was able to damage emotional facets of Helwyze in her newly discovered strength, the young woman Gladys is powerful enough to stir those long-ignored feelings in the old scholar: Olivia was strong enough to dampen the flame of Helwyze's emotions, but Gladys was even stronger and rekindled them (both being stronger than he). Gladys tries to obtain Helwyze's promise that he will no longer trouble Felix's soul, and there is

> something about her, perilously frank and lovely though she was, which held in check his lawless

> spirit and made it reverence, even while it rebelled against her power over him (227).

Thus, she is able to get him to accept her path as the righteous one. He accepts her as his own personal guide to salvation, for Gladys tells him that if she looks into his soul, she shall find there what she looks for, namely justice and generosity. However, Helwyze cannot overcome the fact that his desire for Gladys is fundamentally sexual. He attempts to rationalize his concessions to Gladys by claiming that

> It was her intellect he loved and wanted, not her heart; that she might give to her husband wholly, since he understood and cared for affection only: her mind with all its lovely possibilities, Helwyze coveted, and reasoned himself into the belief that he had a right to enjoy it, *conscious all the while that his purpose was a delusion and a snare*"(232, my emphasis).

Given the context of such highly sexual scenes as the interview in which Gladys is drugged, Helwyze can only be relating Gladys's power over him--the sexual--in terms he can understand, the terms of his power--the intellectual. He tries to fool himself into believing that his interest in Gladys is on an intellectual level, but she achieves complete control over "the hidden tide of thought and feeling in his... breast, where lay the image of Gladys, as placid, yet as powerful as the moon which ruled the ebb and flow of that vaster ocean"(233).

Perhaps the best evidence of the influence Gladys holds over Felix is her pushing him to mature--again, typical of

nineteenth-century ethical writing. A notable example of this is Canaris's adoption of a work ethic during his acquaintance with Gladys. She teaches the wayward Felix by example, claiming, when asked how she will resist the temptation of material things, "I shall work!"(115) and suggesting (in an assertion of domestic strength) that she and Felix work in secret to earn the money necessary to be free of Helwyze's rule. Prior to the marriage, Felix is self-serving and lazy, earning his poet's laurels through deceit; he lives a wild life ignoring responsibility and morality. When faced with the model of Gladys, however, he discovers that hard work can be a purifying process--when on vacation in the country, Felix recounts:

> I dug acres, it seemed to me, and amazed the gardener with my exploits. Liked it, too; for [Gladys] was overseer, and would not let me off till I had done my task and earned my wages. A wonderfully pleasant life, and I am the better for it, in spite of my sunburn and blisters (234).

Canaris takes the value of the work ethic to heart. After Gladys's death and Helwyze's paralysis, Felix refuses any help from Jasper and Olivia, even his dearly-bought fame, because he must "make worthy to follow her."(286)

SEXUALITY AND THE ROMANCE

Although these similarities do exist between the works, as well as means of conveying theme such as the use of the flower motif, there also exist, as I have tried to show, differences between the works of Alcott and Hawthorne--

differences which suggest that Alcott has effectively rewritten the Hawthornian romance. A key difference in the way the two stories are presented which has yet to be discussed is the presence and treatment of sexuality. Hawthorne's entire novel clearly centers itself on the issue of sexuality: the sin of adultery. However, the writing reflects the Puritan influences which shape not only the characters of the novel, but which shaped Hawthorne as well. From the entrance of the Hester to the scaffold to the departure of Dimmesdale into the after-life, their sexual encounter is framed in strictly controlled, austere, unprovocative phrasing. The nearest any character comes to showing an emotional reaction (besides abhorrence) to their union is Hester's whispered claim to Dimmesdale that "what we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other!"[78], to which Dimmesdale merely commands "Hush, Hester!"[79] Even to each other, they refer to their actions as making them "sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened."[80] Their sexual experience is only "sin."

A Modern Mephistopheles, on the other hand, is sexually charged along the lines of Alcott's sensationalist works. The first encounter between Felix and Gladys is marked by a sense of voyeurism when the young man spies "something wonderfully virginal and fresh about the maidenly figure"(21). Upon returning from their honeymoon, the

newlywed couple frankly points out that "bad weather made it impossible to be romantic" so Felix "could not resist making poetry when he should have been making love"(107-108). The relationship between Helwyze and Gladys takes on highly sexual note during the hasheesh interview:

> Then Helwyze did an evil thing,--a thing few men could or would have done. He deliberately violated the sanctity of a human soul, robbing it alike of its most secret and most precious thoughts. Hasheesh had lulled the senses which guarded the treasure, now the magnetism of a potent will forced the reluctant lips to give up the key (204-205).

The provocative description of Gladys's "guarded treasure" in this passage coupled with the sense of Jasper violating Gladys seems even more sexual when considered with the subsequent description of the couple:

> Like a thief he stole to Gladys' side, took in his the dimpled hands whose very childness should have pleaded for her, and fixed his eyes upon the face before him, untouched by its helpless innocence, its unnatural expression. The half-open eyes were heavy as dew-drunken violets, the sweet red mouth was set, the agitated bosom still rose and fell...(205).

This language, as well as containing erotic descriptions of Gladys also reiterates the position of Helwyze as criminal and likely to desecrate her, possibly physically molesting her.

Alcott couples the sexual tones of the development of Gladys with the metaphor of Gladys as leaving behind her associations with white, spring-time flowers. She recounts that Gladys "often paused to question with eager lips, to

wipe wet eyes, to protest with indignant warmth, or to shiver with the pleasurable pain of a child who longs, yet dreads, to hear an exciting story to its end"(122) at the things she learned from Helwyze's book--he "enjoyed the rapid unfolding of the woman...though conscious that the snow-drop, transplanted suddenly from the free fresh spring-time, could not live in this close air without suffering"(122). Gladys's physical responses to literature clearly need to be read as a sexual experience, which Alcott emphasizes by having Helwyze sense that she will lose touch with the her virginal qualities as a result of the knowledge she attains through her exposure to books.[81]

Ultimately, the sexual dimensions of Alcott's work, the aspect which most sets it apart from The Scarlet Letter, is placed in the context of Hawthorne's work through the discussion of the romance by Helwyze and Gladys. In one of the most teasing scenes in A Modern Mephistopheles, Gladys and Helwyze discuss Hawthorne's novel, his characters, and the romance, the form historically linked to Hawthorne. At this point in her novel, Alcott suggests parallels between her characters and Hawthorne's, tying her work to the tradition of the romance upon which Hawthorne relied. However, the characters who discuss the Hawthornian romance have already been established as characters inexorably associated with sexuality. Consequently, the comparison between the events and characters of The Scarlet Letter and

those of A Modern Mephistopheles contains an implicit contrast between the stoic, sexually reserved Hawthornian characters and the sensual, physical characters of Alcott.

Of primary importance are the responses to The Scarlet Letter by Alcott's characters because Alcott's figures can be better understood through examining their reactions to and associations with Hawthorne's novel. For example, when Helwyze comes to learn that Gladys occupies herself with The Scarlet Letter, "the hands loosely clasped behind him were locked more closely by an involuntary gesture, as if the words made him wince"(240). Jasper identifies himself with Roger Chillingworth, for when he implies that Roger should be seen with pity because of the love he felt for Hester, he exhibited "the peculiar flicker in his eyes, as of a light kindled behind a carefully drawn curtain"(241); Helwyze seems to hope that Gladys will divine the parallels between himself and Chillingworth, and thereby realize his love. It is Dimmesdale's brand, however, that Jasper wears as he retires to his chamber after the discussion--"he stole away to his own room...only now his usually colorless cheek burned with a fiery flush and his hand went involuntarily to his breast, as if...he carried an invisible scarlet letter branded there"(244-245). Alcott thus creates in Helwyze a character who embodies both Chillingworth's evil and Dimmesdale's inability to cope with his sinfulness.

Gladys, on the other hand, is not so much identified with one or several of the characters in The Scarlet Letter--instead she is a character who transcends the levels of the figures in Hawthorne's book: she is in a position to interpret and judge them without being put on the level of any of them. Gladys is a heroine in the ethical sense while Hester is not drawn out of the same tradition of moral literature. She admires Hester and pities Dimmesdale, and she finds Chillingworth guilty of "the unpardonable sin." Says Gladys:

> Hawthorne somewhere describes it as "the want of love and reverence for the human soul, which makes a man pry into its mysterious depths, not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold, philosophical curiosity. This would be the separation of the intellect from the heart: and this, perhaps would be as unpardonable a sin as to doubt God, whom we cannot harm; for in doing this we must inevitably do great wrong both to ourselves and others"(241).

Not only does Gladys play her role in this Hawthornesque romance, but she clearly also makes her reading of Hawthorne applicable to those around her. Thus she becomes not only a character in the tradition of Hawthorne, but, more importantly, she becomes a character in the rewriting of Hawthorne's tradition. Her ability to understand Hawthorne *and* apply her knowledge to those around her facilitates her placing herself above Helwyze and his tendency to do exactly what Hawthorne is warning her against--separating the intellect from the heart. She continues her reading of The Scarlet Letter by reiterating her analysis of the characters

in hopes of prompting Helwyze to disclose the secret of the bond between himself and Felix:

> Hester's suffering ennobled her, because nobly borne; Dimmesdale's destroyed him, because he paltered weakly with his conscience. Roger let his wrong turn him from a man into a devil, and deserves the contempt and horror he rouses (242).

Here Gladys is playing on Helwyze's association of himself with Roger Chillingworth, trying to show that his behavior, like Roger's, is evil, and then, with her understanding that the only way to reach Jasper is through intellect, she immediately follows the analysis of The Scarlet Letter characters with an observation about Hawthorne's form which is highly applicable to her own situation:

> The keeping of the secret makes the romance; the confession of it is the moral, showing how falsehood can ruin a life, and truth only save it at last (242).

Gladys is not only able to pass judgment on the characters in Hawthorne's novel, but she has morally exceeded her peers so thoroughly that she is able to prescribe proper morality for them--in this case, indicating to Helwyze that he should divulge his secret.

There is much more to Gladys's statement on "the keeping of the secret making the romance" than merely associating it with her higher moral nature, however. Although it must be assumed that Gladys is not a character extension of Louisa May Alcott, this statement by Gladys can easily be seen as a conscious insertion by Alcott to tie her own work into the form (or formula) which Hawthorne made his

trademark. By putting this analysis in the mouth of her heroine, Alcott not only achieves a certain distance from the statement, but she also emphasizes the applicability of the comment to the course of events in A Modern Mephistopheles because the comment is being made by a character wrapped up in those events. Alcott's characters are much different from Hawthorne's, as is the emphasis on sexuality in the relationships between them, and with the discussion of The Scarlet Letter included in her book, Alcott demonstrates her understanding of the forces which helped her to develop her own style.

These forces inspired Alcott ultimately to delve into the romance much as Hawthorne articulated it. However, by putting her commentary on the romance in the mouth of Gladys, and thereby distancing herself from it, Alcott gives herself the literary freedom to take liberties with the romance as treated by Hawthorne. In particular, Alcott is able to draw characters in a much more explicitly sexual manner than did Hawthorne. On an ethical level, Gladys's statement is clear: the secret makes the romance with the confession the moral and truth is good where falsehood is bad. However, considered in a sexual context, Gladys's assertion assumes a different meaning: repression of sexuality (such as Helwyze's) creates the conflict of the romance, and confrontation with one's own repressed sexuality (again, Helwyze) shows that the repression will

cause dysfunctional relationships like the ones that Helwyze cultivated (the moral). The falsehood of denying sexuality will ruin one's life, where the acceptance of one's own sexual identity, such as Gladys achieves in her maturation, allows for the reconciliation of ethical conflicts which, ultimately, enables Gladys to die in peace.

With the inclusion of the discussion of the romance, Alcott invites the reader to consider her work in the same terms as Hawthorne's. As a feminist, this is understandable. Alcott would have wanted the same standards for her literature as for that of males. Psychologically, Alcott may have wanted to validate her work in the eyes of those critical of women's fiction as a means of exercising some power over males by whom she was often intimidated.[82] Alcott's work does more than just approach Hawthorne's, however. It subtly inserts an ideal into his accepted form which would not have been considered in Puritan tales which tend to ignore the significance of sexuality in reconciling ethical dilemmas.

Alcott's inclusion of the discussion of the romance is thus not merely an attempt to validate herself, but perhaps also serves to make a statement about the incompleteness of past attempts to utilize the romance as an attempt to probe moral conflicts. However, A Modern Mephistopheles is not merely an exercise in criticizing The Scarlet Letter--there is obviously a great deal of respect on the part of Alcott

for Hawthorne. More likely than not, Alcott's novel reflects two things: first, an appreciation of and a certain amount of homage to a man whose work she clearly respected, and, second, enough pride and confidence in her own work that she wanted boldly to place herself among those whom she did respect. Her book, an anonymous secret at the time of publishing and a secret virtually untapped by recent critics amidst a flood of interest in Alcott and other female writers, is a sum which reaches beyond the parts of its creation. It builds on the sensationalist conventions while infusing them with a moral beyond that of blood-and-thunder tales, it draws on ethical literature while not limiting itself to the chasteness of children's literature, and it explores the tradition of the Hawthornian romance, utilizing, expanding on, and commenting on the literary contributions of a figure who was of literary and personal significance to Alcott.

ENDNOTES

1. Anonymous, "Review of A Modern Mephistopheles, 1877," in Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott, ed. Madeleine B. Stern (Boston: G,K, Hall & Company), 203. Reprinted from The Atlantic Monthly, 40 (July 1877), 109.

2. Certainly the question of defining a work as a "classic" is tricky at best. As Jane Tompkins points out in discussing The Scarlet Letter in her book Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), a text is not a classic because it endures throughout the generations. Rather, the "literary and cultural tradition" believing in the classic perpetuates that notion, ensuring the durability of a select few works.(34-36) However fabricated the status of The Scarlet Letter may or may not be, the fact that it is widely known and often considered by critics comforts me in my use of it as a way of examining Alcott's novel.

3. Louisa May Alcott, August, 1850 entry, The Journals of Louisa May Alcott, eds. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company), 63.

4. Ibid., (April, 1864) 129.

5. Martha Saxton, Louisa May: A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 183.

6. Ibid.

7. Elaine Showalter, Alternative Alcott, (London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), ix.

8. Ruth K. McDonald, Louisa May Alcott, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 10.

9. Showalter, Alternative Alcott, ix.

10. Sarah Elbert, A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture (London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), xiv.

11. Madeleine B. Stern, Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984), 1.

12. Saxton, Louisa May, 298-299.

13. I choose to use the term "ethical literature" after Madeleine Stern in order to represent this broad spectrum of writing which, Nina Baym explains, has been "variously labeled 'sentimental fiction,''fiction of sensibility,' and 'domestic fiction'...[as well as] 'domestic sensibility.'(Nina Baym, Woman's Fiction, 24)

14. Charles Strickland, Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott, (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1985), 4.

15. MacDonald, Louisa May Alcott, 19.

16. Nina Baym, Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 18.

17. Ibid., 26.

18. Stern, Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott, 3.

19. Madeleine B. Stern, Introduction to A Modern Mephistopheles and Taming a Tartar, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), viii.

20. Showalter, Introduction to Alternative Alcott, xix.

21. Louisa May Alcott, January 21, 1863 entry, The Journals of Louisa May Alcott, 116-117.

22. Saxton, Louisa May, 258.

23. Nina Baym, Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 208.

24. Ibid.

25. Strickland, Victorian Domesticity, 93.

26. Ibid.

27. Such as the New England Woman Suffrage Association (Showalter, Elaine, Introduction to Alternative Alcott, xxiii).

28. "....in A Modern Mephistopheles both of her selves are welded, the sensational is joined with the ethical." Stern, Intro to A Modern Mephistopheles, xxxiv.

29. Ibid., viii.

30. Ibid., xvi.

31. MacDonald, Louisa May Alcott, 89.

32. Ibid., 92.

33. Ibid., 93.

34. Ibid.

35. Showalter, Alternative Alcott, x.

36. New England Transcendentalism, which flourished from 1830 to 1880, was a philosophical movement which takes its name from the use of the term "transcendental" by Kant to refer to "ideas received by intuition instead of through the experience of the senses." Theodore Parker (1830-1860) explains in his lecture The Transcendentalist that the transcendentalist believes "that man has faculties which transcend the senses; faculties which give him ideas and intuitions that transcend sensation experience; ideas whose origins is not from sensation , nor their proof from sensation." From: William Henry Harrison, Introduction to Transcendental Wild Oats by Louisa May Alcott, (Harvard, Massachusetts: The Harvard Common Press, 1975), 7-8.

37. "The Hawthorne" is a poem "seven stanzas of eight lines each," which is a densely detailed, energetic, and even witty poem, though not a great one, providing a good-humored self-dramatization of Alcott at a crucial juncture of her life, after she had published many short works of fiction and drafted Moods, but before she won fame with Hospital Sketches and Little Women. From: Rita K. Gollin, "Louisa May Alcott's 'Hawthorne,'" Essex Institute Historical Collections, 118 (Jan 1982): 42-43.

38. Ibid., 42.

39. Ibid., 43.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 48.

42. **Richard H. Brodhead,** The School of Hawthorne, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 49.

43. Hyatt H. Waggoner, The Presence of Hawthorne, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 143.

44. "...it seems impossible to disentangle the Hawthorne sensibility in general from the specific works and so to be sure we are talking about real influence and not just similarities. Writers create their works out of all they are and all they have experienced, including the books they have read that form a significant part of their experience. Hawthorne may seem to be present in writers who deny not just any debt but any kinship. When this happens, the question becomes whether we are justified in seeing a significant relationship, or whether we should be content to say only that we have been subjectively reminded of Hawthorne." Waggoner, 144.

45. Ibid., 160.

46. Brodhead, The School of Hawthorne, 51.

47. Ibid., 53. For further consideration of the relationship between Hawthorne and the publishing community, Brodhead's The School of Hawthorne, particularly chapter three, "Manufacturing You into a Personage: Hawthorne, the Canon, and the Institutionalization of American Literature," is invaluable.

48. Ibid., 56.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 64.

51. This, coupled with his literary reputation, has resulted in twentieth century critics tending (at least until recently) to take his definition as a standard definition for the form. For instance, John Caldwell Stubbs claims "Nathaniel Hawthorne was the master of the form of the American romance...he adopted his literary theory and even some of his fictional materials from contemporary writers and therefore was able to direct his creative energies mainly toward shaping the theory and the materials into carefully textured artifice." John Caldwell Stubbs, The Pursuit of Form: A Study of Hawthorne and the Romance, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 3.

52. Quoted in Ibid., 5.

53. Quoted in Baym, Novels, Readers, and Reviewers, 228-229.

54. Quoted in Ibid., 229.

55. In one current thread of criticism, Nina Baym claims that Hawthorne is not consistent with the notions of his day regarding the romance: "In brief, insofar as Hawthorne used the term romance to signal something to his readers, he seems to have confused them; to the extent that they could make sense of his definition, it struck them as wrong. Readers would expect a romance to contain intensity, passion, excitement, and thrills resulting from ornate rhetorical treatment and from a focus on action. Hawthorne did not deliver on these." She goes on to assert that the "main general discussions of the term romance in this era developed idiosyncratic definitions with no necessary application to the actual practice of fiction writers at the time." Ibid., 234.

56. Stubbs, The Pursuit of Form, xiv.

57. Ibid., 7.

58. Baym, The Shape of Hawthorne's Career, 124.

59. Ibid., 5.

60. Ibid., 6.

61. Nina Baym, The Shape of Hawthorne's Career, Ithica, New York, Cornell University Press, 1976), 124.

62. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Custom House" in The Scarlet Letter; An Authoritative Text, Essays in Criticism and Scholarship, 3rd Edition, Edited by Seymour Gross, Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 27-28.

63. Ibid., 28.

64. Louisa May Alcott, A Modern Mephistopheles, ed. Madeleine B. Stern, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 273. All subsequent citations will be to this edition and will appear in the text in parentheses.

65. Edward R. Burlingame, "Review of A Modern Mephistopheles, 1877," Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott, 205. Reprinted from The North American Review, 125 (September 1877), 316-318.

66. Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, 89.

67. William Bysshe Stein, Hawthorne's Faust: A Study of the Devil Archetype, (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1953), 105.

68. Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, 55.

69. Ibid., 174.

70. Ibid., 116.

71. Ibid., 175.

72. Ibid., 35.

73. Ibid., 36.

74. Ibid., 336, note 1.

75. Ibid., 77.

76. As Hester claims, "she is my happiness!--she is my torture, none the less...she is the scarlet letter." Ibid., 78.

77. Ibid., 78.

78. Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, 133.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., 137.

81. Felix is prone as well to sexual allusions due to his literary relationship to Helwyze. Jasper refers to the young man as his "Alcibiades"(38), and the narrator relates that, before Gladys married Canaris, "the wildest speculations were indulged in [regarding Canaris's relationship with Helwyze]: many believed them to be father and son; others searched vainly for the true motive of this charitable caprice; and every one waited with curiosity to see the end of it"(117). One does not, I think, read too much into the text to consider that a "true motive" which must have been considered at the time was that a sexual relationship begot the partnership between the two.

82. A reading of some of her sensationalist works indicate that she used her pen as a means of expressing a desire to see women holding power (besides that of greater moral fortitude typical in ethical literature of the time) over men.

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